

Back Home: Tyler Johns Returns to Lead Findlay Football

For Tyler Johns, the dream was never complicated.

It was always Findlay.

From the moment he walked out of the arch in 2013 and started his coaching career, there was one job circled. One place that never left his mind, no matter how far he traveled or how many programs he worked for. So when he saw the job opened up for head football coach of the Oilers, there was no hesitation on what he needed to do next.

“This has always been my dream,” Johns said. “No matter where in the country I'm at, that's the job that I want.”

Now, years after leaving the University of Findlay as a player, Johns is back, this time fulfilling his dream of leading the orange and black that started 13 years ago. His return marks a full-circle journey defined by growth, connection, and Findlay football tradition that made this place home.

As a student athlete earning All Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Association honors during his senior season, “home” meant something different to Johns; it was the locker room, the friendships, and the brotherhood built on and off the field.

But time has changed the meaning of “home.”

“As a player here, home was where my best friends were,” Johns said. “As I've gotten older, the thing that you realize is that those people change. They go from being your friends and the people that you love spending time with to becoming your support system.”

This shift is evident in the life Johns has built since leaving Findlay. Former teammates became lifelong friends, and their families are intertwined. Their children are now growing up together in the place that once made them who they are today.

It's that sense of connection, not just to the university but to the people, that made returning to Findlay feel right.

“The community here in Findlay, Ohio, that's what makes it special,” Johns said. “They have the same values, and they go out, and they look out for each other, and they really make sure that we're all able to advance together.”

Walking back onto campus, Johns didn't just return to a job; he returned to a flood of memories.

From major wins during the 2011 season to unforgettable memories at Donnell Stadium, the highlights are still vivid. But what stands out the most are the small everyday experiences that defined his college years.

“You start to come back to a place, and all the memories start flooding back,” Johns said. “And all the little things that sometimes you forget about.”

Even now, those memories are physically present. Newspaper clippings from his playing days hang in the office he now occupies as head coach and serve as a reminder of where he started and how far he has come.

For Johns, the reality of his new role didn't fully sink in until the team's first spring practice.

“When you're doing workouts and stuff, it's one thing to be the head coach,” Johns said. “It's a whole other thing when you go to end a practice, you call the team up, and you're like, ‘Oh wait, I'm the one who has to talk to them now.’ ”

That first practice marked a shift but also reinforced the responsibility he now carries. And as an alumnus, that responsibility feels even greater.

“I have some tremendously big shoes to fill,” Johns said. “It's more about how do we do it our own way, while we always respect and honor the tradition that those guys built here.”

Rather than trying to replicate the past, Johns is focused on building something authentic and honoring tradition while creating his own path forward.

“The values that we uphold as a football program, those were all values that were instilled in me here as a student athlete,” Johns said. “So are we putting our own spin on it? Yeah, absolutely. Are we going to give it our own flair and be 100% authentic in who we are as coaches and how we approach it? Yeah, absolutely.”

Now, as he leads the program he once played for, Johns is driven by one central motivation: giving his players the same opportunities and experiences that shaped his own life.

“These are the greatest four to five years that you could ask for,” Johns said. “But I'll say this, it goes so fast.”

Johns wishes he could tell his younger self to fully embrace every moment and invest completely in the experience. And as he looks ahead, one moment stands out above the rest: Watching his first recruiting class walk out of the arch as better men than they walked in it, as four years prior.

“It's like, gosh, I remember when you were 18 years old, and you're just so darn proud of who they've become, who they are, and the things that they're going to go do in their life,” Johns said. “That for me is going to be an incredible day.”

Because for him, this job is about more than just football. It's about people, relationships, traditions, and coming back to the place that started it all. And for Tyler Johns, there is no better place than home.

“This is exactly where we want to be,” Johns said. “And we're going to be able to do something special here.”